



Courts and Tribunals Judiciary

SUMMARY

Various Claimants -v- Associated Newspapers Limited
[2026] EWHC 1637 (KB): Mr Justice Nicklin
7 July 2026

[References in square brackets are to paragraphs in the judgment of the Court]

1. The Court has today handed down judgment following the trial of claims brought by seven Claimants against Associated Newspapers Limited (“Associated”), the publisher of the *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and MailOnline. The 46-day trial of the action took place between 19 January and 31 March 2026.
2. The Claimants are Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE, Elizabeth Hurley, Sir Elton John CH CBE, David Furnish, Sir Simon Hughes, Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex, and Sadie Frost Law.
3. The claims alleged misuse of private information and/or breach of confidence arising from alleged unlawful information gathering (“UIG”). The alleged methods included the use of private investigators, “*blagging*” — obtaining information by deception — phone hacking and/or corrupt payments. The Claimants alleged that, once obtained, Associated used this information to publish articles in its newspapers and online. Associated denied all wrongdoing. In the alternative, it argued that the claims had been brought too late.
4. The parties and background are set out at [2]–[4], and the claims and Associated defence at [5]–[10]. The key milestones in the litigation are set out in Appendix 1.
5. The trial required the Court to decide whether the Claimants had proved that particular articles or incidents were the result of UIG. The Judgment explains the evidence relied upon by the parties at [13]–[77], the common themes and recurring evidential issues at [78]–[153], and then considers 57 separate articles and incidents individually at [154]–[1446].

The Court’s approach

6. The Court emphasised that it was for the Claimants to prove UIG. These were civil claims, so the legal test was whether the allegations were proved on the balance of probabilities. But the allegations were serious: they included allegations of dishonesty, unlawful conduct and deliberately false evidence. The more serious and less likely an allegation is, the more convincing the evidence must be before a court can find it proved. The Court also considered the pleaded allegations, the available documents, missing documents, witness evidence, evidence from people who did not give oral evidence, and propensity evidence — that is, evidence said to show a tendency by particular individuals to use unlawful methods. The Court explained the limits of that kind of evidence, and the limits of what could properly be inferred from the evidence as a whole. Those matters are addressed in the Judgment at [40]–[65].

7. The Court accepted that, given the nature and age of the allegations, the Claimants' cases often depended on inference. But suspicion, even where understandable, was not enough. The Claimants had to prove that the information complained of had been obtained unlawfully. The Court rejected the argument that, simply because information was private, and because Associated could not positively explain how it had been sourced, the relevant article must have been unlawfully sourced.
8. In earlier case management decisions, and again at trial, the Court made clear that these proceedings were civil claims brought by individual Claimants. They were not a public inquiry into the conduct of Associated generally. The Court therefore controlled the scope of the Claimants' general case about Associated's conduct and required the trial to focus on the pleaded issues and on the particular articles and incidents relied upon by the Claimants: see Appendix 1 and, in particular, [A1.7]–[A1.27]. The Court's approach is explained at [44]–[48], [82]–[93] and [145]–[150].
9. It follows that the Court has not made findings as to whether UIG was "*widespread and habitual*" at Associated. Instead, the Court has adjudicated on the specific claims that were brought by the Claimants. In doing so, it applied an article-specific approach, considering whether the evidence proved that each article or incident was the product of UIG.
10. In broad terms, Associated called journalist witnesses who gave lawful explanations for the sourcing of the disputed articles and incidents. The Court accepted their evidence, including their denials of UIG. The Court's detailed assessment of the trial witnesses is set out in Appendix 2.

Decision on the claims

11. For the reasons explained in the Judgment, the Claimants failed to prove their pleaded allegations of UIG. The Court rejected the attempt to prove the claims by broad inference where there remained a legitimate and realistic possible lawful source pathway, or where the article-specific evidence did not prove that the relevant information must have been obtained unlawfully.
12. The Court also held that the parties were bound by the cases they had pleaded. It was not permissible, at trial, to replace a pleaded allegation with a different, and in many instances more serious, allegation of UIG.
13. The claims are therefore dismissed.

Limitation

14. Associated also argued that, even if the Claimants had proved their claims, the claims had been brought too late. That alternative defence is known as limitation. Civil claims must be brought within the period laid down by statute. These claims were subject to a 6-year limitation period. The Claimants relied on an exception to that rule. They argued that the facts relevant to their claims had been deliberately concealed by Associated, and that time should therefore run from when they discovered, or could with reasonable diligence have discovered, those facts.
15. Because the claims were dismissed on their merits, it was not necessary for the Court to decide Associated's limitation defence in relation to most of the claims. The Court explained that, where the alleged UIG had not been proved, and the way in which it was said to have occurred remained undefined, it would not be appropriate to invent a

hypothetical version of the facts in order to decide whether such a hypothetical claim would have been brought too late: see [1447]–[1456] and [1605]–[1606].

16. The Court did decide the limitation issue in respect of certain specific claims brought by Sir Simon Hughes and Sadie Frost Law concerning the Miskiw/Anderson Emails. The Court held that those claims would, in any event, have been time-barred: see [1500]–[1573].
17. As part of their concealment case, the Claimants alleged that three senior Associated executives — Paul Dacre, Elizabeth Hartley and Peter Wright — had lied in their evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. The Court held that the Claimants had failed to prove those allegations: see [1574]–[1604].

Next steps

18. A hearing will take place on 29–30 July 2026 to hear argument on any points of dispute as to the consequential orders to be made following the Judgment.
19. Any members of the public or media who want to attend the hearing on 29-30 July 2026 remotely by video link should follow the procedure that is set out in the Order that has also been published by the Court today. The deadline for requesting a video link is 10am on 22 July 2026.

NOTE: This summary is provided to help in understanding the Court's decision. It does not form part of the judgment. The full judgment of the Court is the only authoritative document. Judgments are public documents and are available at: www.judiciary.uk, <https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk> and www.bailii.org